

30 May 2013

From: Detainee(s) on hunger strike in Naval Base, Guantanamo Bay

An open letter to my military doctor: allow independent medical access

Dear Doctor,

I do not wish to die, but I am prepared to run the risk that I may end up doing so, because I am protesting the fact that I have been locked up for more than a decade, without a trial, subjected to inhuman and degrading treatment and denied access to justice. I have no other way to get my message across. You know that the authorities have taken everything from me.

For this reason, I am respectfully requesting that independent medical professionals be allowed into Guantanamo to treat me, and that they be given full access to my medical records, in order to determine the best treatment for me.

You claim to be acting according to your duties as a physician to save my life. This is against my expressed wish. As you should know, I am competent to make my own decisions about medical treatment. When I try to refuse the treatments you offer; you force them upon me, sometimes violently. For those reasons, you are in violation of the ethics of your profession, as the American Medical Association¹ and World Medical Association² have made clear.

My decision to go on hunger strike and to endure semi-starvation for over 100 days was not entered into lightly. I am doing it because it is literally the only method I have to make the outside world pay attention. Your response to my carefully considered decision cannot logically lead to the conclusion that your only goal is to save my life—your actions over recent months do not support such an inference.

For those of us being force-fed against our will, the process of having a tube repeatedly forced up our noses and down our throats in order to keep us in a state of semi-starvation is extremely painful and the conditions under which it is done are abusive. If you truly had my best medical interests at heart, you could have talked to me like a human being about my choices, instead of treating me in a way that feels like I am being punished for something.

You must know that your professional overreaction to my participation in the hunger strike has been condemned by no lesser an authority than the United Nations; the Special Rapporteur on Health has stated unequivocally that “health care personnel may not apply undue pressure of any sort on individuals who have opted for the extreme recourse of a hunger strike, nor is it acceptable to use threats of forced feeding or other types of physical or psychological coercion against individuals who have voluntarily decided to go on a hunger strike.”³

In any regard, I cannot trust your advice, because you are responsible to your superior military officers who require you to treat me by means unacceptable to me, and you put your duty to them above your duty to me as a doctor. Your dual loyalties make trusting you impossible.

For these reasons, our present doctor-patient relationship cannot contribute to resolving the threats to my health that this hunger strike is engendering. You may be able to keep me alive for a long time in a permanently debilitated state. But with so many of us on hunger strike, you are attempting a treatment experiment on an unprecedented scale. And you cannot be certain that human error will not creep in and result in one or more of us dying.

¹ <http://www.ama-assn.org/ama/pub/category/16086.htm>; <https://www.documentcloud.org/documents/694196-hunger-strikers-letter-04-25-13.html>

² <http://www.wma.net/en/30publications/10policies/h31/index.html>

³ <http://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=13279&LangID=E>

Your superiors, up to and including President Obama, their Commander-in-Chief, recognise that my death or that of another hunger striker here would have serious undesirable consequences. You have been ordered to guarantee - with absolute certainty - my survival, but it is beyond your (or perhaps any doctor's) ability to do that.

I have some sympathy for your impossible position. Whether you continue in the military or return to civilian practice, you will have to live with what you have done and not done here at Guantanamo for the rest of your life. Going forward, you can make a difference. You can choose to stop actively contributing to the abusive conditions I am currently enduring.

I am asking you only to raise with your superiors my urgent request that I be allowed access to examination by and independent medical advice from a doctor or doctors chosen by my lawyers, in confidence, and that those doctors be supplied with my full medical notes in advance of their visit. This is the least you can do to uphold the minimum of your oath to "do no harm."

Yours sincerely,

The Detainees on Hunger Strike at Guantanamo Bay Naval Base

(Signed by detainee)

_____/s/____

Younous Chekkouri, ISN 197

Nabil Hadjarab, ISN 238

Shaker Aamer, ISN 239

Ahmed Belbacha, ISN 290

Abu Wa'el Dhiab, ISN 722

Samir Mukbel, ISN 043

Adel al-Hakeemy, ISN 168

Sanad al-Kazimi, ISN 1453

Mohammed Hidar, ISN 498

(Signed by lawyers on
behalf of their clients)

_____/s/____

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(Signed by concerned Guantanamo
Defense Counsel)

_____/s/____

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